

# CONFERENCES – PAST

## 2008 Agricultural History Annual Meeting University of Nevada, USA



*Campus at the University of Nevada*

### *Abigail Hunt of Peterborough Regional College reports on the Annual Conference of the Agricultural History Society (of America)*

**I first heard about the Agricultural History Society in late 2006 when the 2007 CFP was announced. I was immediately struck by two things; firstly the breadth of discussion taking place at this event and secondly its relevance to those of us researching British agricultural history. Unfortunately I was too late to submit a proposal, but decided to apply for the 2008 conference and seek funding from the University of Lincoln to participate.**

So, in June 2008 I was lucky enough to attend the conference and present a paper based on my research with funding from the University of Lincoln and a travel bursary awarded by the Agricultural History Society.

My paper was titled “Women as Producers and Consumers in Lincolnshire: Changing Agricultural Practice and its Effects on Rural Culture during the mid to late twentieth century.” The aim of this paper was to examine the role of women as producers and consumers in rural Lincolnshire against a background of profound change in agricultural practice and life in the countryside from the 1950s to the 1970s. The paper was developed from my doctoral research material which examines how changes in agricultural practice have affected rural culture in

Lincolnshire between c.1930 and 2000. It drew on oral testimonies gathered as part of my doctoral research, and set findings against the growing historiography examining later twentieth-century rural English society and culture. I did not expect anyone in the audience to be familiar with the geographical area my research covers, and was surprised to meet an academic from Australia who came to listen to my paper as she visits her husband’s family in Alford, Lincolnshire, on a regular basis!

The conference was held in a brand new facility, on the University of Nevada Campus, which was an amazing location, overlooked by the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The theme for 2008 was agriculture, environment and Society in a global perspective, which encompassed sub themes from gender, to agricultural history and the media, and even a session on ways of teaching agricultural history.

I attended several lectures, by postgraduate students and professors from universities across the USA. The papers were wide ranging in scope and those I attended covered topics such as the option of concrete as a building material in 1930s rural America, organic agriculture in post war America, German views of the forest

during the Enlightenment, county fairs in Florida and the agrarian image of the state during the 1920s. There was also a highly interesting panel that focused on teaching agricultural history in a global context, and dealt with issues such as how to attract students towards agricultural history modules on offer at universities. Throughout the conference I was struck by the high quality of the papers by fellow post graduate students and the confidence with which they presented them, and I learned a huge amount about writing and presenting papers by attending this conference.

The highlight of the conference for me was an after dinner speech by Jim Harkness, President of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Minneapolis, who spoke about the current world state and fate of agriculture. His lecture focused on the challenges the West currently faces in farming and the opportunities the Chinese Government is creating for its own economy through its agricultural policy.

There was also a fantastic field trip to Virginia City, Carson Valley and Lake Tahoe, which included a lecture by the state historian and a quick glimpse of the Bonanza ranch! This journey across the Comstock which took in attractions such as the historic Fourth Ward School gave participants a feel of what the West was like during the gold and silver rushes of the nineteenth century.



*Old buildings in Virginia City Nevada*

One of the most interesting aspects of the conference was the amount of research taking place on both sides of the Atlantic that is being undertaken in parallel, when perhaps a new approach might be to investigate the relationship and similarities between agricultural history in the USA and Britain. Hence my submission for the 2009 meeting in Little Rock Arkansas, of a paper about the shared experiences of women in agriculture in both countries during the 20th century.